

Government's roles as a regulator, collector, producer, provider, and user of information are governed by the principles of stewardship and usefulness which result in agencies working together to achieve common goals.

Slide 1

In its role as regulator, the government is a critical player in assuring the free flow of information in society. [Slide 1] The democratic principles of information - right of free expression, right to profit from invention, right of public access to government records, right to protection of personally identifiable and sensitive information - play an important part in this system. These basic democratic principles of access, proprietary rights, and privacy are in constant conflict with information rights. Thus, we establish public information policies in an attempt to balance these conflicts.

For example:

- One information right can conflict with another - These types of conflicts are illustrated by the **Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press vs. the United States Department of Justice** and the fair use provisions of the copyright act.
- An information right can conflict with another policy concern - An example of this is the **ACLU et al. vs. Reno case** on the **Communication Decency Act** in which the right to full use of the content of the World Wide Web conflicts with the obligation to protect our children. The **Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court case** is another example.
- A dispute over how to implement or set the boundaries of an information right - These conflicts are represented by such questions as how to achieve the universal service goals of the **Telecommunications Act** and what work should or should not be funded by the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

In its role as information collector, producer, provider, and user, two other policy principles apply: stewardship and usefulness. Both are important and neither should dominate [Slide 2].

Slide 2

Stewardship is evidenced in every public sector agency that works to protect the accuracy and integrity of the information it collects and disseminates. This is a conservative principle that addresses:

- Treatment of government information as a fiduciary responsibility of all agencies which are managers, not owners, of information
- Data collection decisions and methods
- Data definition, quality, and integrity
- Information and system security
- Confidentiality protections
- Records management and disposition

We see stewardship in action every day in **New York State government**, in such instances as **privacy laws**, **technology policies** that deal with guarding personal identifiers and protecting systems and databases from misuse, **privacy notices** on forms and Web sites, **data dictionaries** that define data in very specific ways, and retention schedules that dictate the **value and longevity of records**.

The other principle of information use within government is that of usefulness. This is an expansive principle that focuses on the value of information as an asset. Usefulness addresses such issues as:

- Information as an asset of government and its value for primary and secondary uses today and in the future
- Information sharing within and between government and other organizations
- Information-handling skills of public employees
- Information as an agent of change in programs, services, and the relationship between government and citizens

Like stewardship, usefulness is constantly in action within government. Citizens and governments need

information for a variety of reasons and use it for a number of purposes. Some examples of the usefulness principle are: the technology policy encouraging data sharing between government agencies, digital photos on your driver's license that improve customer service, the **State Comptroller's Web site** where citizens can find unclaimed funds owed to them, and the **New York City Police Department's** COMPSTAT system that uses incident reports to put officers in areas that have the most crimes.

Slide 3

The **NYS Data Sharing Cooperative**, a two-year-old initiative that is part of the **NYS GIS Coordination Program**, is a good example of how stewardship and usefulness work together to help agencies deal with tough problems [Slide 3]. The Cooperative's membership includes more than 100 organizations - including New York state and local agencies, several non profit organizations, and agencies from other states - that banded together to acquire group benefits. Stewardship issues at work in the Cooperative include compiling metadata, appointing primary data custodians, and establishing a standard data sharing agreement. The usefulness of the Cooperative is evidenced in the data inventory that ensures access to the information, data exchange and reuse policies that make it easy to contact other agencies and use their information, and data improvements that occur when other agencies add value to the information. The Cooperative also has some information use issues, like whether to charge fees for the use of data and the role of the private sector, that it is still resolving.

A prime example of the Data Sharing Cooperative's value is found in the actions of government agencies in the wake of the January 1998 ice storm that crippled New York's North Country. The storm affected 130,000 people and 1,800 farms, causing them to lose power, water, phone, and heat services for several days during the height of winter. Due to the Cooperative, agencies charged with helping people deal with the effects of the storm were able to share information that enabled them to fulfill that mission. The GIS data helped the **Emergency Management Office** set up command centers; maps from the **Department of Transportation** were critical in getting the roads cleared of debris; the **Office of Real Property Services'** records helped determine the locations of farms that needed assistance; **Department of Health** information aided hospitals; **MapInfo Corporation** provided information that enabled the **National Guard** to make logistical arrangements. The success of this joint effort to serve those affected by the North Country ice storm was made possible by the Data Sharing Cooperative.

And while stewardship and usefulness are important, experience is also a crucial factor. It is agencies' experiences that tell them where problems will occur, what traditions to employ, and which unspoken rules to follow. Information use in government is guided by the interaction of stewardship and usefulness tied together with experience.